

ten years on the edge
VERTIGO X

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SUGGESTED FOR
MATURE READERS
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FABLES™

BILL
WILLINGHAM
MARK
BUCKINGHAM
STEVE
LEIALOHA

IN THE FOOTHILLS OF THE CASCADE MOUNTAINS...

AMONG MY PEOPLE-- WELL, WHAT **USED** TO BE MY PEOPLE, AND THEN JUST ON MY MOTHER'S SIDE--THE FIRST STIRRINGS OF ROMANCE ARE USUALLY TRIGGERED WHEN WE ENCOUNTER THE ONE WHO, FOR SOME REASON, JUST **SMELLS** RIGHT TO US--WHO STANDS OUT FROM EVERYONE ELSE.

ONE OF THE REASONS YOU **SURVIVED** OUR FIRST MEETING WAS THAT YOUR SCENT SEEMED IMMEDIATELY PLEASING TO ME.

ARE YOU KIDDING ME? I WAS A **MESS** BACK THEN, AFTER WEEKS ON THE RUN FROM THE ADVERSARY'S LEGIONS, THEN THREE DAYS IN ONE OF HIS CHAIN GANGS. I WAS COVERED WITH DIRT AND HADN'T SEEN A BATH, OR THE **WORKING** END OF A **PERFUME** BOTTLE FOR...

NEVERTHELESS.

BUT I WASN'T MUCH INTERESTED IN HUMAN GIRLS BACK THEN. I GUESS IT TOOK **CENTURIES** OF LIVING AS A HUMAN MYSELF FOR THE ATTRACTION TO GROW ON ME.

SO I'M YOUR FIRST **EXPERIMENT** WITH AN ACQUIRED TASTE?

NOT EXACTLY.

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Storybook
Love



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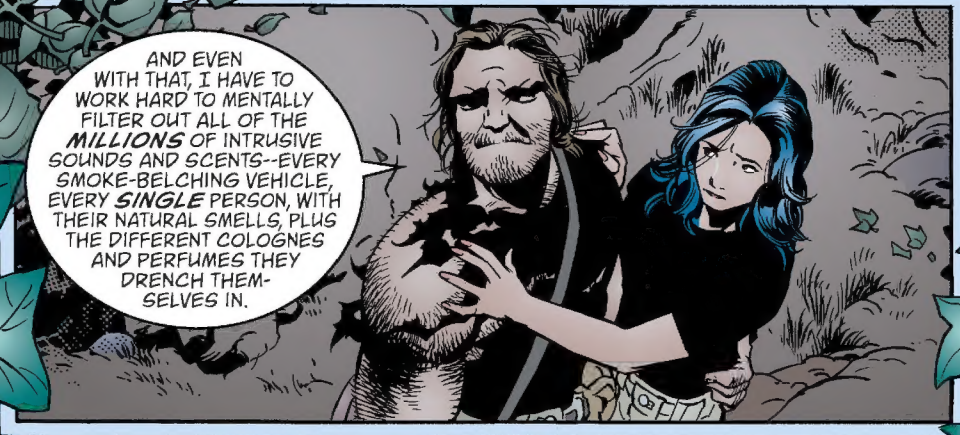
YOU'RE THE WOMAN I CAN'T IGNORE.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? IT SOUNDS VAGUELY INSULTING.

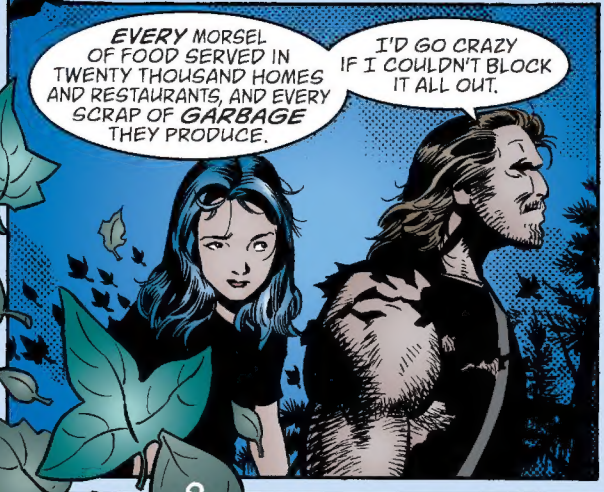


LIVING IN THE CITY, I HAVE TO SMOKE LIKE A BRISTOL CHIMNEY JUST TO DEADEN MY SENSES ENOUGH TO PUT UP WITH THE MASSIVE INFORMATION OVERLOAD.

I'VE NOTICED.



AND EVEN WITH THAT, I HAVE TO WORK HARD TO MENTALLY FILTER OUT ALL OF THE MILLIONS OF INTRUSIVE SOUNDS AND SCENTS--EVERY SMOKE-BELCHING VEHICLE, EVERY SINGLE PERSON, WITH THEIR NATURAL SMELLS, PLUS THE DIFFERENT COLOGNES AND PERFUMES THEY DRENCH THEMSELVES IN.



EVERY MORSEL OF FOOD SERVED IN TWENTY THOUSAND HOMES AND RESTAURANTS, AND EVERY SCRAP OF GARBAGE THEY PRODUCE.

I'D GO CRAZY IF I COULDN'T BLOCK IT ALL OUT.



AND WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH ME, BIGBY?


BECAUSE YOU AND YOU ALONE I CAN'T BLOCK OUT, NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRY--AND BELIEVE ME, I'VE TRIED.



I KNOW WHERE YOU ARE, EVERY SECOND OF EVERY DAY. I KNOW IF YOU'RE HAVING GOOD OR BAD DREAMS WHILE YOU SLEEP.


I KNOW WHAT KIND OF MOOD YOU'RE IN BY SUBTLE CHANGES IN YOUR NATURAL MUSK, NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU BATHE...

...OR WHAT MANUFACTURED SCENTS YOU CHOOSE TO WEAR.



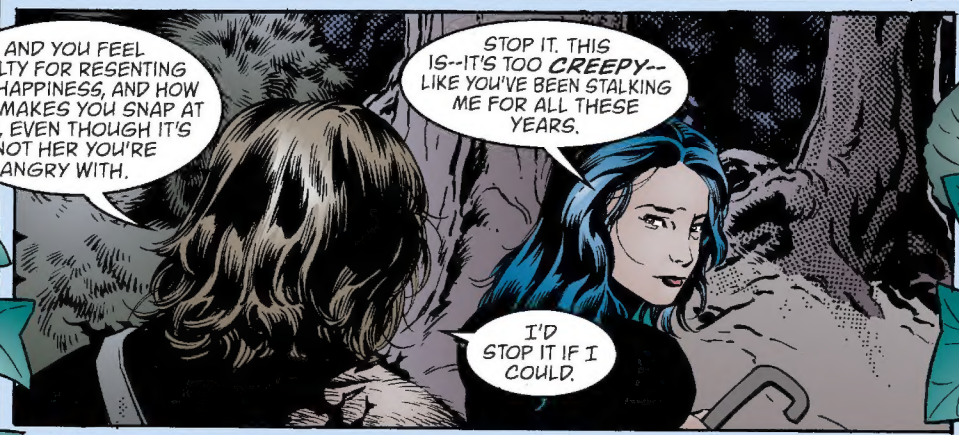
I KNOW WHEN YOU'RE HAPPY, WHICH IS RARE; WHEN YOU'RE SAD; AND WHEN YOU FEEL **DESPERATELY LONELY**--WHICH IS ALL TOO OFTEN.

I THINK WE SHOULD STOP TALKING ABOUT THIS NOW.



I KNOW YOU GET **JEALOUS** WHENEVER YOU HAVE TO TALK TO BEAUTY, BECAUSE OF HOW SUCCESSFUL HER MARRIAGE HAS BEEN, ALL THINGS CONSIDERED--HOW UNRELENTINGLY **LOYAL BEAST** IS TO HER.

PLEASE--



AND YOU FEEL GUILTY FOR RESENTING HER HAPPINESS, AND HOW THAT MAKES YOU SNAP AT HER, EVEN THOUGH IT'S NOT HER YOU'RE ANGRY WITH.

STOP IT, THIS IS--IT'S TOO **CREEPY**-- LIKE YOU'VE BEEN STALKING ME FOR ALL THESE YEARS.

I'D STOP IT IF I COULD.

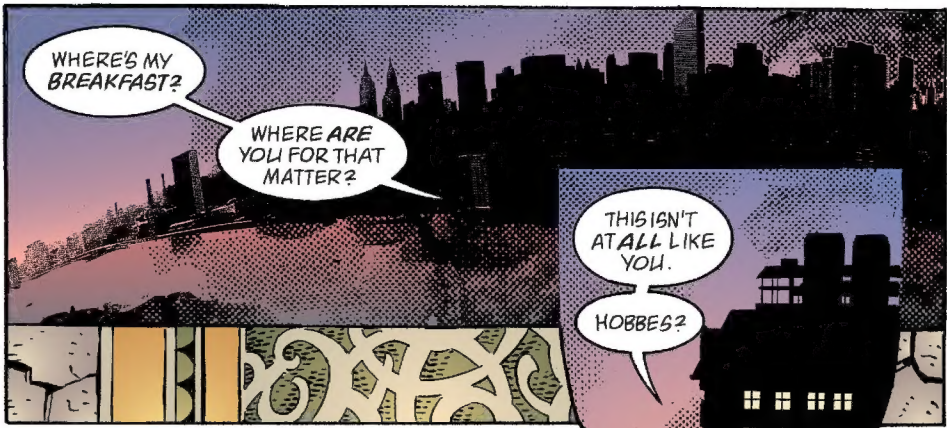


YOU'LL RECALL, IN THE FIRST YEARS IN EXILE, I TRIED TO LIVE APART FROM YOU AND THE OTHER FABLES. BUT YOU **INSISTED** I COME TO THE NEW WORLD AND JOIN YOUR GRAND EXPERIMENT.



STILL...

YOU SHOULD LEARN NOT TO ASK QUESTIONS YOU CAN'T STAND TO HEAR THE ANSWERS TO.



WHERE'S MY BREAKFAST?

WHERE ARE YOU FOR THAT MATTER?



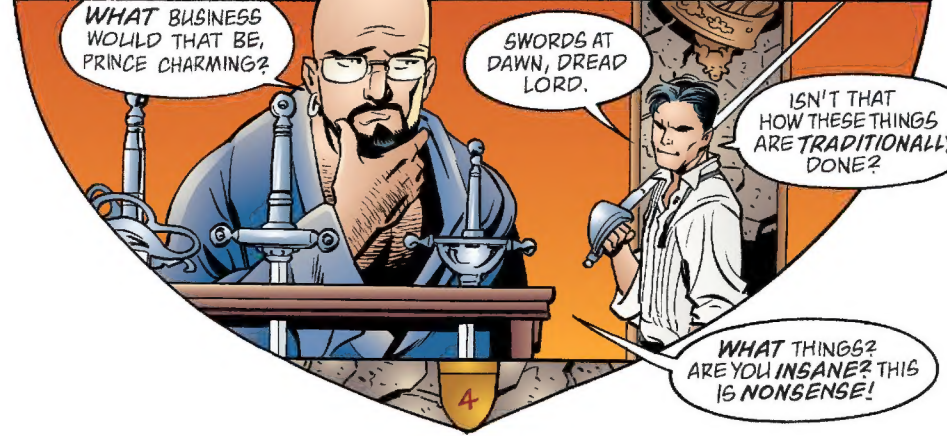
THIS ISN'T AT ALL LIKE YOU.

HOBBES?



YOUR BUTLER ISN'T HERE, BLUEBEARD. I SENT HIM AWAY-- GAVE HIM THE DAY OFF, IF YOU WILL.

WE'RE ALONE, WITH NO ONE TO INTERRUPT OUR BUSINESS TOGETHER.




WHAT BUSINESS WOULD THAT BE, PRINCE CHARMING?

SWORDS AT DAWN, DREAD LORD.

ISN'T THAT HOW THESE THINGS ARE TRADITIONALLY DONE?

WHAT THINGS? ARE YOU INSANE? THIS IS NONSENSE!



DON'T TRY TO LEAVE THIS ROOM, OR I'LL RUN YOU THROUGH. DON'T TRY TO GRAB UP SOME HIDDEN GUN, OR OTHER WEAPON OF ADVANTAGE, OR I'LL RUN YOU THROUGH.

STOP TALKING LIKE THAT!

YOUR ONLY CHANCE TO SURVIVE THE NEXT FEW MINUTES IS TO TAKE UP A BLADE AND KILL ME, FOR I CERTAINLY INTEND TO KILL YOU.


BUT WHY? WHAT HAVE I DONE?

THERE ARE SO MANY GOOD REASONS TO END YOUR MISERABLE EXISTENCE, IT'S HARD TO CHOOSE.

BUT, ALL OTHER THINGS CONSIDERED, I SUPPOSE I'M GOING TO KILL YOU AS A FAVOR TO SNOW. I'VE TREATED HER SO BADLY OVER THE YEARS THAT IT'S HIGH TIME TO DO SOMETHING TO MAKE UP FOR IT.

BY KILLING ME? WHAT WILL THAT ACCOMPLISH? I'VE NEVER DONE ANYTHING TO HER!

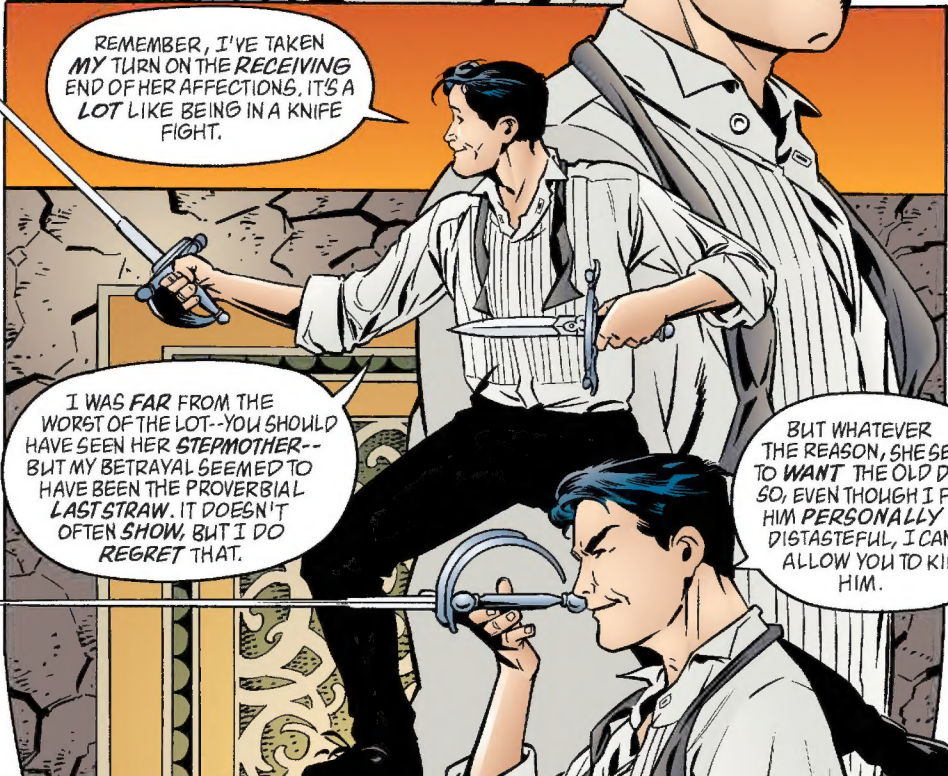
DON'T DISSEMBLE. I'VE HAD A LOOK AT YOUR DIARY--WELL, NOT DIRECTLY, BUT MY SPY REPORTED IN. I KNOW YOU'RE PLANNING TO MURDER BIGBY.



AND FOR REASONS THAT *DEFY* UNDERSTANDING, SNOW SEEMS TO *LIKE* THE MANGY BEAST--HELL, SHE MIGHT ACTUALLY BE IN LOVE WITH HIM.

BUT--?


OH, DON'T GO BY HOW SHE *TREATS* HIM. SHE'S BEEN SO RELENTLESSLY *BETRAYED* BY EVERYONE SHE'S EVER LOVED, SHE CAN'T *HELP* BUT SNAP AND SNARL AT A NEW LOVE.



REMEMBER, I'VE TAKEN *MY* TURN ON THE *RECEIVING* END OF HER AFFECTIONS. IT'S A LOT LIKE BEING IN A KNIFE FIGHT.

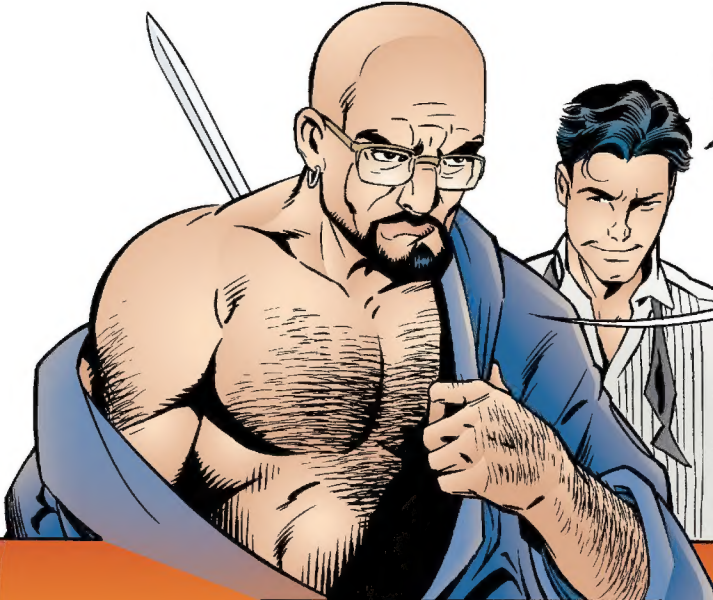
I WAS FAR FROM THE WORST OF THE LOT--YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN HER *STEMOTHER*-- BUT MY BETRAYAL SEEMED TO HAVE BEEN THE PROVERBIAL *LAST STRAW*. IT DOESN'T OFTEN *SHOW*, BUT I DO *REGRET* THAT.

BUT WHATEVER THE REASON, SHE SEEMS TO *WANT* THE OLD DOG, SO, EVEN THOUGH I FIND HIM *PERSONALLY* DISTASTEFUL, I CAN'T ALLOW YOU TO KILL HIM.



SINCE WHEN DOES AN *UNREPENTANT* ROGUE LIKE YOU SUDDENLY DECIDE TO ACT SO NOBLY? HOW DO YOU NOT *CHOK*E ON SUCH HYPOCRISY?

LOOK AT IT THIS WAY: WITH SOMEONE LIKE ME, NOBLE *URGES* OCCUR SO *SELDOM* THAT I CAN HARDLY AFFORD TO IGNORE THE RARE FEW THAT *DO* COME ALONG.



NOW, I THINK YOU'VE KEPT METALKING MERELY TO *STALL* FOR TIME. FILL YOUR *HAND*, BLUEBEARD, AND LET'S BE ABOUT OUR GRIM BUSINESS.

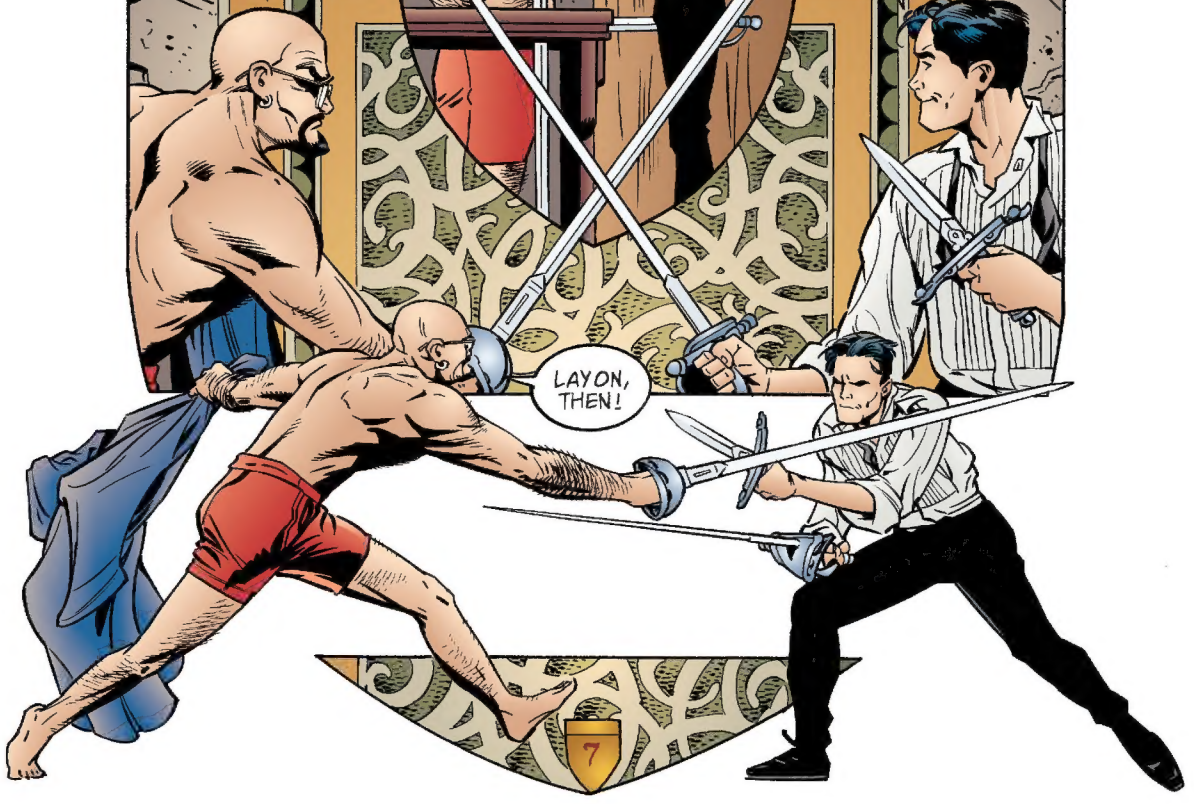
FINE! I'LL RUN YOU THROUGH, IF YOU *INSIST!*



I DO.


REMEMBER HOW *EASILY* I BEAT YOU IN OUR RECENT FENCING BOUT?

PERFECTLY. BUT LET'S SEE IF *REAL* BLADES AND *REAL* DANGER MAKE A DIFFERENCE THIS TIME, *SHALL* WE?



LAY ON, THEN!





I'M TIRED, BIGGY. MY LEGS ARE ABOUT TO GIVE OUT.

IF YOU'D TURN BACK INTO A WOLF, I COULD RIDE AGAIN AND WE'D COVER MORE GROUND.

SOON, BUT NOT YET.

TRY TO HOLD ON FOR A BIT LONGER. WE DON'T WANT TO GET TOO FAR AHEAD OF OUR PURSUER.

WHY NOT? ISN'T THAT THE WHOLE POINT OF GETTING AWAY?

NOT ALWAYS. IF WE SIMPLY RUN FOR IT, WE COULD LIKELY GET AWAY *THIS TIME*, BUT AT THE RISK OF LETTING HER CHOOSE WHEN AND WHERE TO STRIKE THE NEXT TIME.

BETTER TO FIND GOOD GROUND HERE AND END IT.

"HER"?

DID YOU SAY "HER"?

YEAH, I FINALLY GOT A WHIFF OF OUR ENEMY. SHE'S DEFINITELY FEMALE AND PROBABLY A FABLE. DO YOU HEAR THAT SOUND--FAINT BUT GETTING CLOSER?

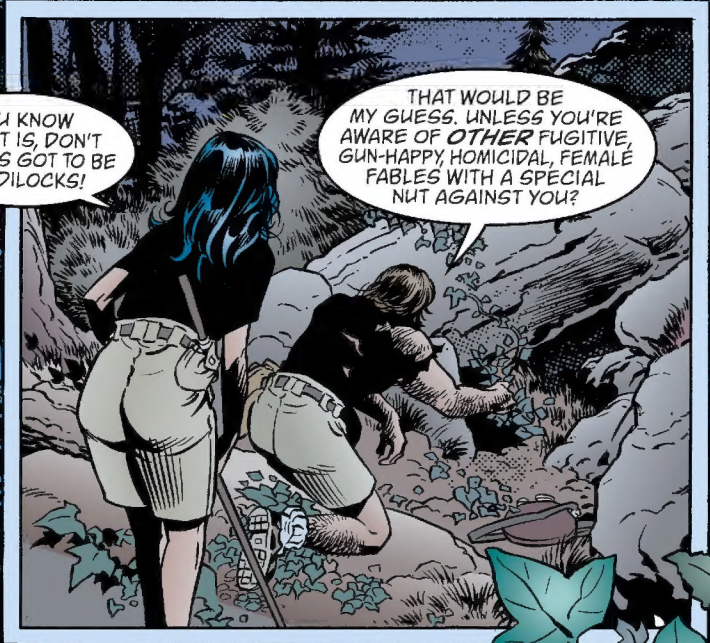
THE CHAIN SAW? YOU SAID THIS IS LOGGING COUNTRY.

SIMILAR SOUND, BUT IT'S NOT A CHAIN SAW. MY GUESS IS A MOTOR BIKE.

SHE'S CLOSING IN, BUT WE MIGHT FINALLY HAVE THE PLACE HERE TO GIVE HER A PROPER WELCOME.

YOU KNOW WHO IT IS, DON'T YOU? IT'S GOT TO BE GOLDILOCKS!

THAT WOULD BE MY GUESS. UNLESS YOU'RE AWARE OF OTHER FUGITIVE, GUN-HAPPY, HOMICIDAL, FEMALE FABLES WITH A SPECIAL NUT AGAINST YOU?

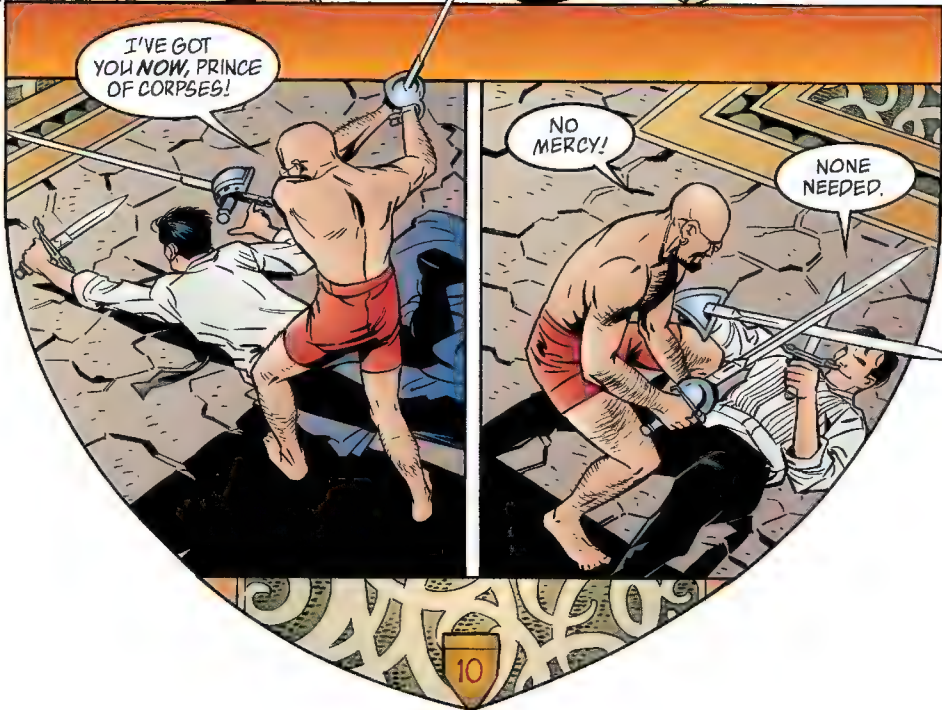
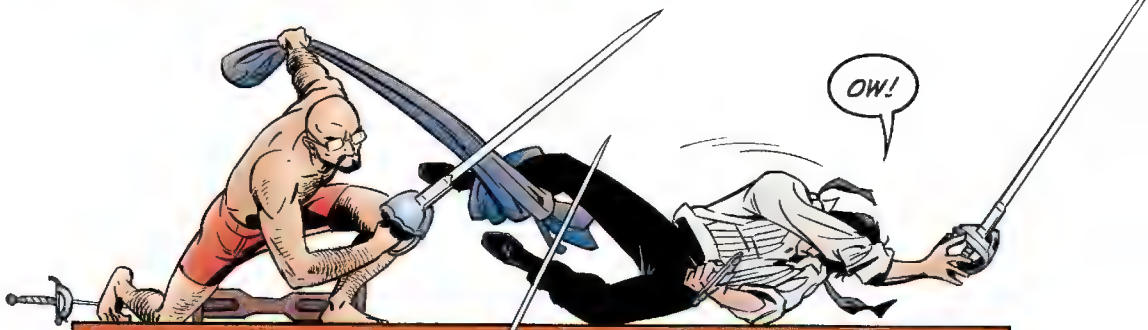
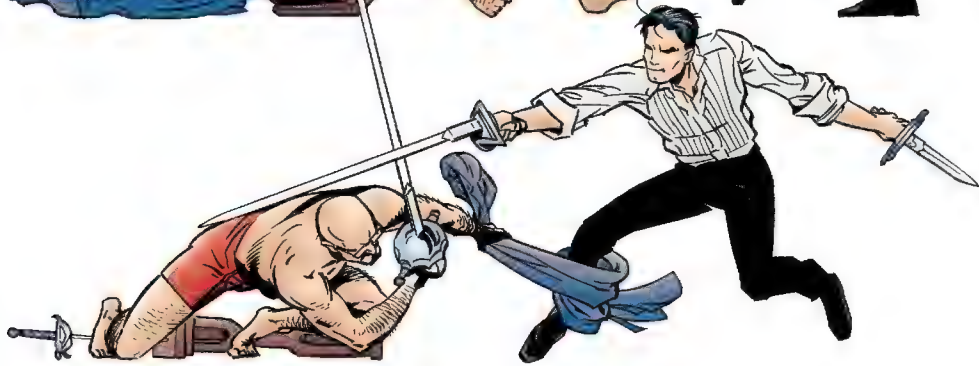
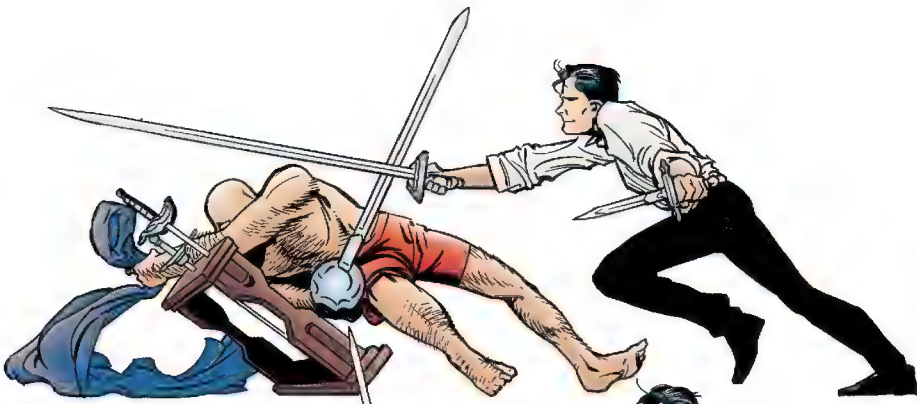


SEE HOW FAR YOU CAN CRAWL UNDER THOSE BOULDERS. YOU'LL NEED SAFE SHELTER FOR THIS NEXT PART.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

A TALENT I GOT FROM MY DAD'S SIDE OF THE FAMILY--ONE I HAVEN'T HAD THE NEED TO USE IN A GOODLY WHILE.

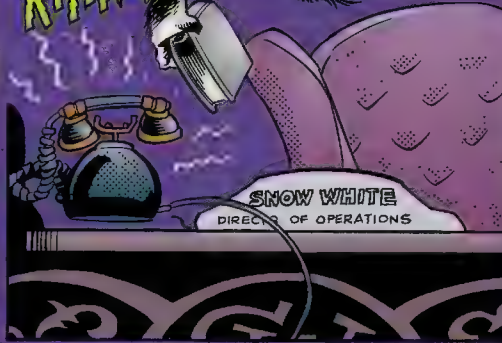
IT'S TIME FOR A BIT OF THE OLD HUFF AND PUFF.



BUSINESS
OFFICE
S. WHITE

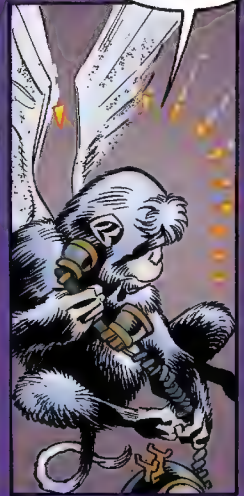
RIIING
RIIING
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RIIING
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RIIING



HELLO?

BUSINESS
OFFICE.



NO, SNOW
WHITE'S
NOT HERE.
SHE LEFT
TOWN.



NO, BIGBY
LEFT TOWN
TOO.



NO, KING
COLE NEVER
COMES
DOWN
HERE.



NO, BLUE
BOY'S FAST
ASLEEP.

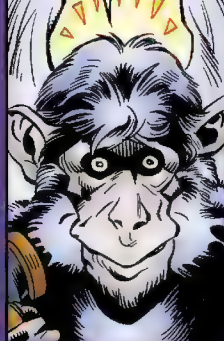


WHO'S IN
CHARGE?



I GUESS
I AM.

I RUN FABLE-
TOWN NOW.

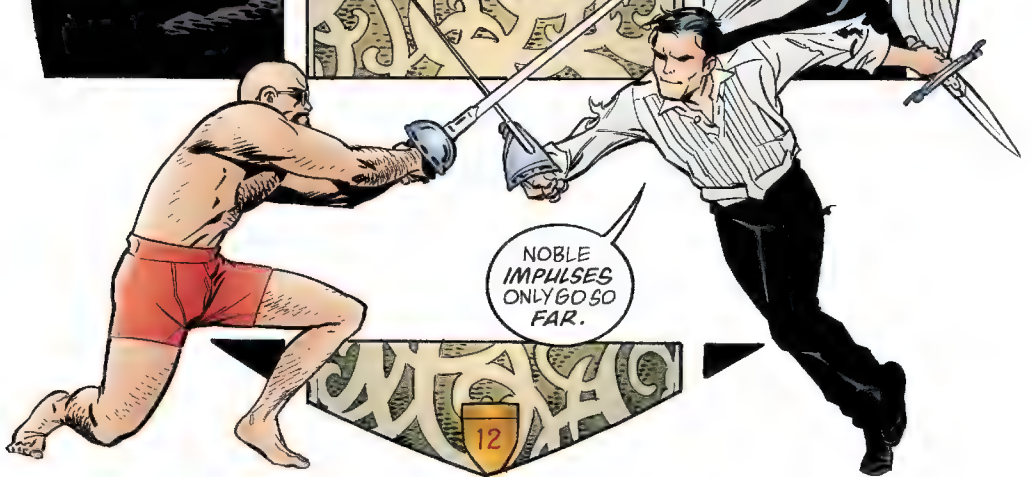
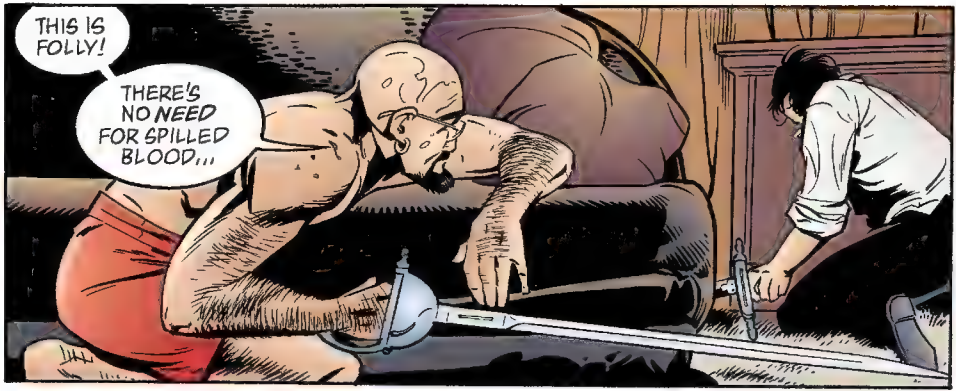


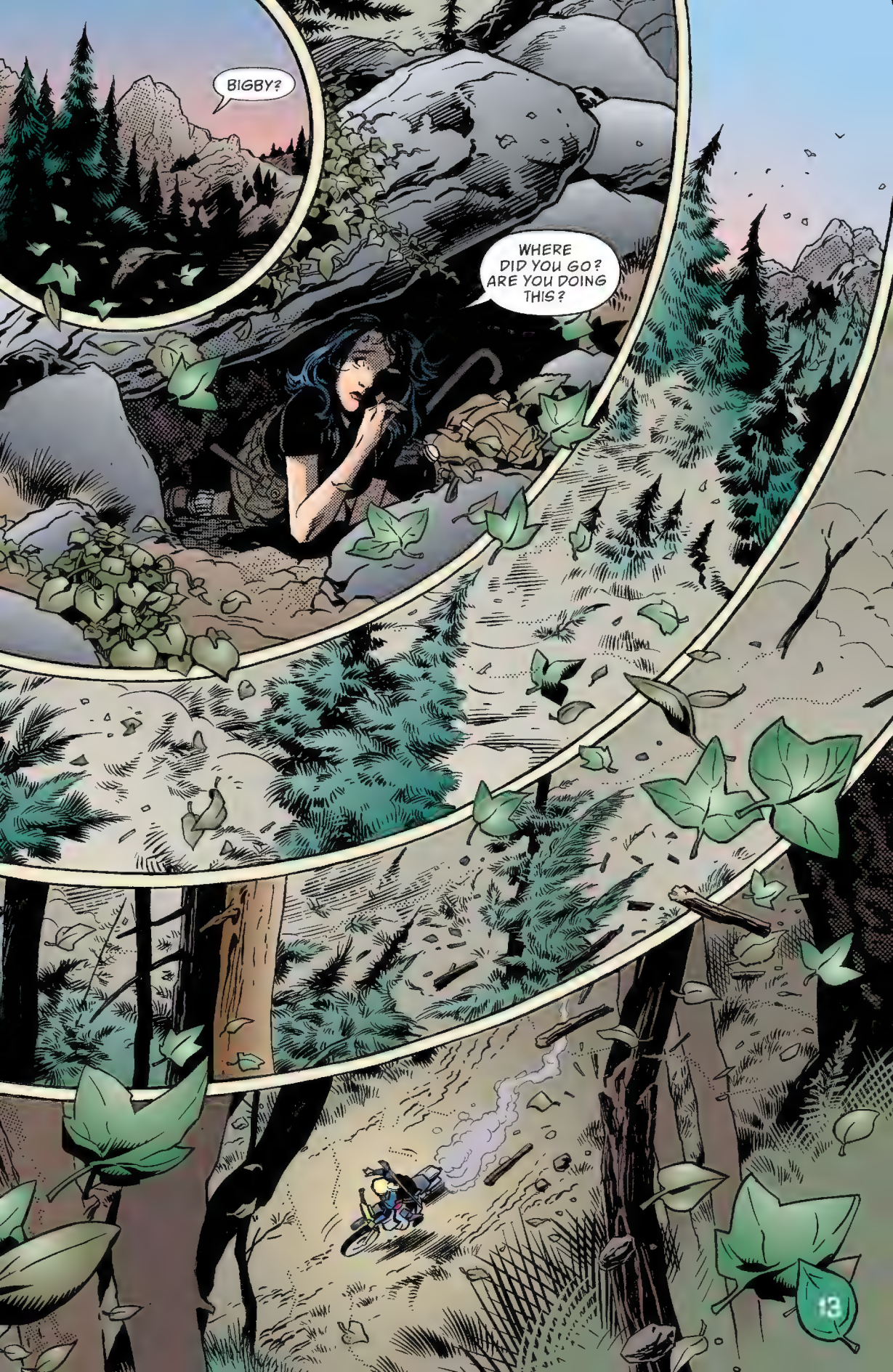
WHY NOT?
I'M A GOOD
MONKEY!



I HARDLY EVER
THROW MY POOP
ANYMORE.





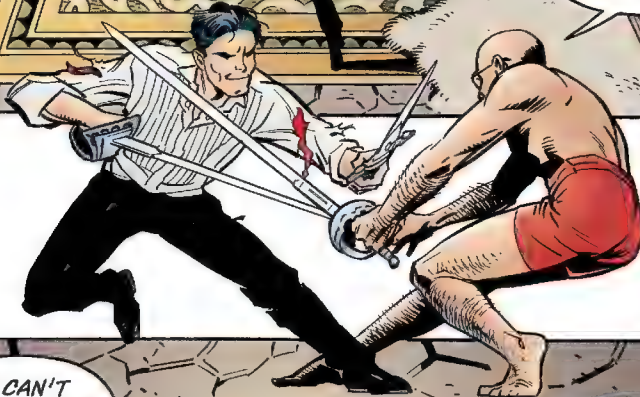


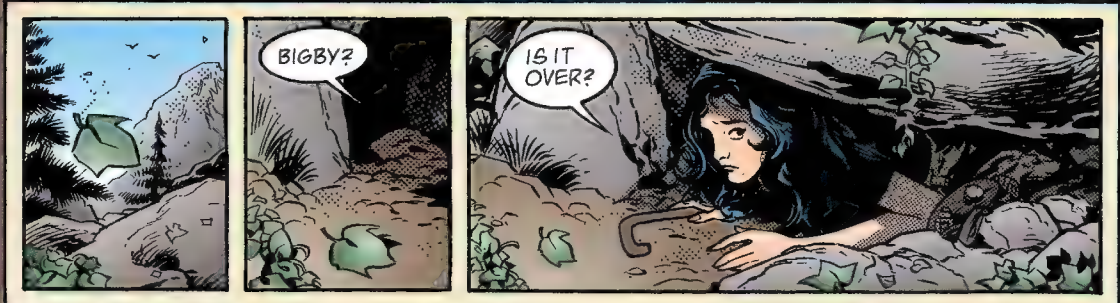
BIGBY?

WHERE DID YOU GO?
ARE YOU DOING THIS?



WHAT THE FLICK?!!





BIGBY?

IS IT OVER?

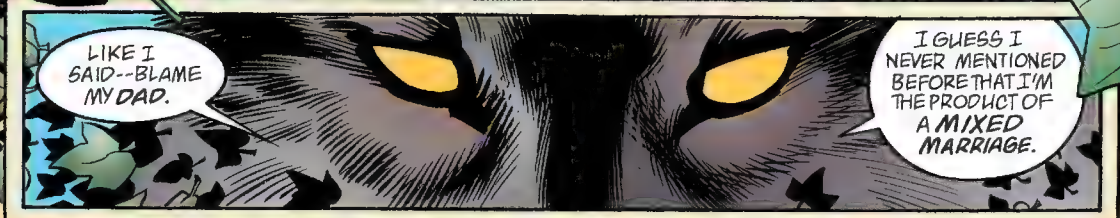


YES, IT'S SAFE TO COME OUT NOW.

I'M DONE.

THAT WAS--

HOW DID YOU--




LIKE I SAID--BLAME MY DAD.

I GUESS I NEVER MENTIONED BEFORE THAT I'M THE PRODUCT OF A MIXED MARRIAGE.




MY FATHER WAS THE NORTH WIND--

--AND HOW HE MET MY MOTHER AND TOOK A SPARK TO HER-- WELL, THAT'S A LONG AND INTERESTING STORY FOR ANOTHER TIME.




LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, I HEARD THE STORY ABOUT YOU AND THE THREE PIGS, BUT I NEVER IMAGINED WHAT YOU COULD REALLY DO.



AND I WAS STILL JUST A GROWING PUP BACK THEN. I DOUBT EVEN A BRICK HOUSE COULD SURVIVE NOW.


DID YOU GET HER?

IS GOLDILOCKS DEAD?




NO, UNFORTUNATELY-- BUT NOT FOR LACK OF TRYING.

KILLING HER THIS WAY WAS A LONG SHOT. IT WASN'T MY PRIMARY GOAL.



I'VE SUCCEEDED IN THE TWO THINGS I'D HOPED TO ACCOMPLISH.

WHICH ARE...?



FIRST, I'VE JUST CREATED A TRAIL POINTING TO US THAT AN IDIOT COULDN'T MISS. GOLDILOCKS SHOULD HAVE NO TROUBLE FINDING US NOW.



AND MORE IMPORTANT, I'VE JUST SHOWN THE LOCAL WINDS WHO'S BOSS.

THEY'RE OBEYING ME NOW--FOR A WHILE AT LEAST.



LONG ENOUGH THAT THEY'LL MANEUVER TO KEEP GOLDILOCKS UPWIND OF US AT ALL TIMES--CARRYING HER SCENT DIRECTLY TO ME, NO MATTER *WHAT* PATH SHE TAKES.

NOW I'LL KNOW WHERE SHE IS EVERY *SECOND*, RIGHT UP UNTIL THE MOMENT SHE ARRIVES.



SO THIS TIME WE'VE SET A TRAP FOR HER?

YUP.



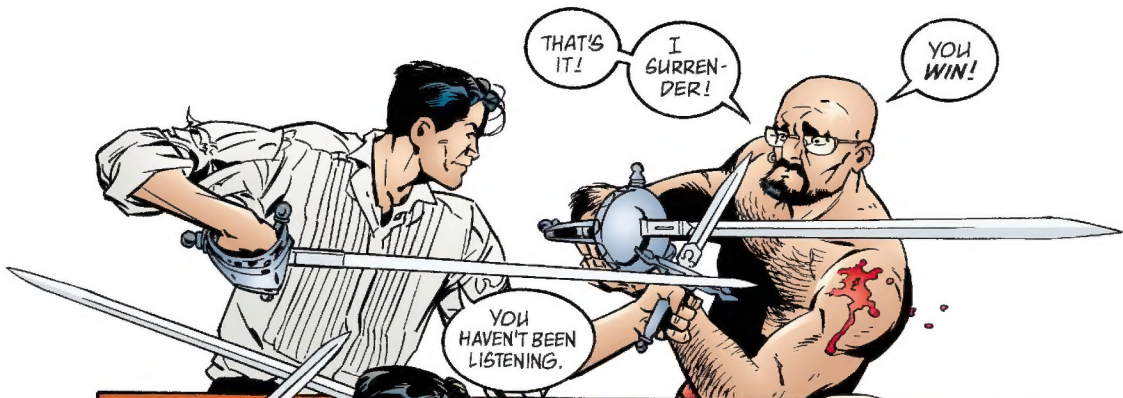
HIDING, STAYING QUIET AND STAYING OUT OF MY WAY--

AND WHAT'S MY PART?

--IF THINGS GO ACCORDING TO PLAN.



JUST IN CASE, THOUGH, LET'S TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU SHOULD BE PREPARED TO DO IF THINGS *DON'T* TURN OUT THE WAY I EXPECT.



THAT'S IT!

I SURRENDER!

YOU WIN!

YOU HAVEN'T BEEN LISTENING.



SURRENDER ISN'T AN OPTION!

BUT I'M BEGGING YOU!

AAAAHH!



YOU PRICK! YOU'VE KILLED ME!



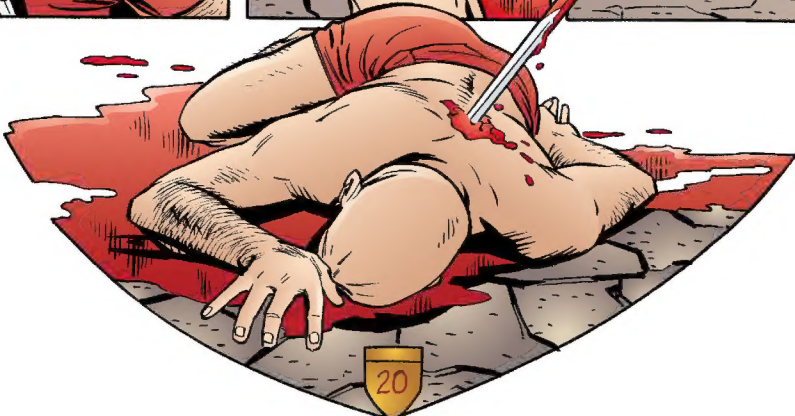
BUT I WIN TOO, THOUGH-- IN A WAY.

I WAS TRYING TO TELL YOU-- BUT YOU WOULDN'T LISTEN.



YOU SEE-- I ALREADY KILLED THE WOLF, AND YOUR PRINCESS, TOO.

ALREADY DONE.

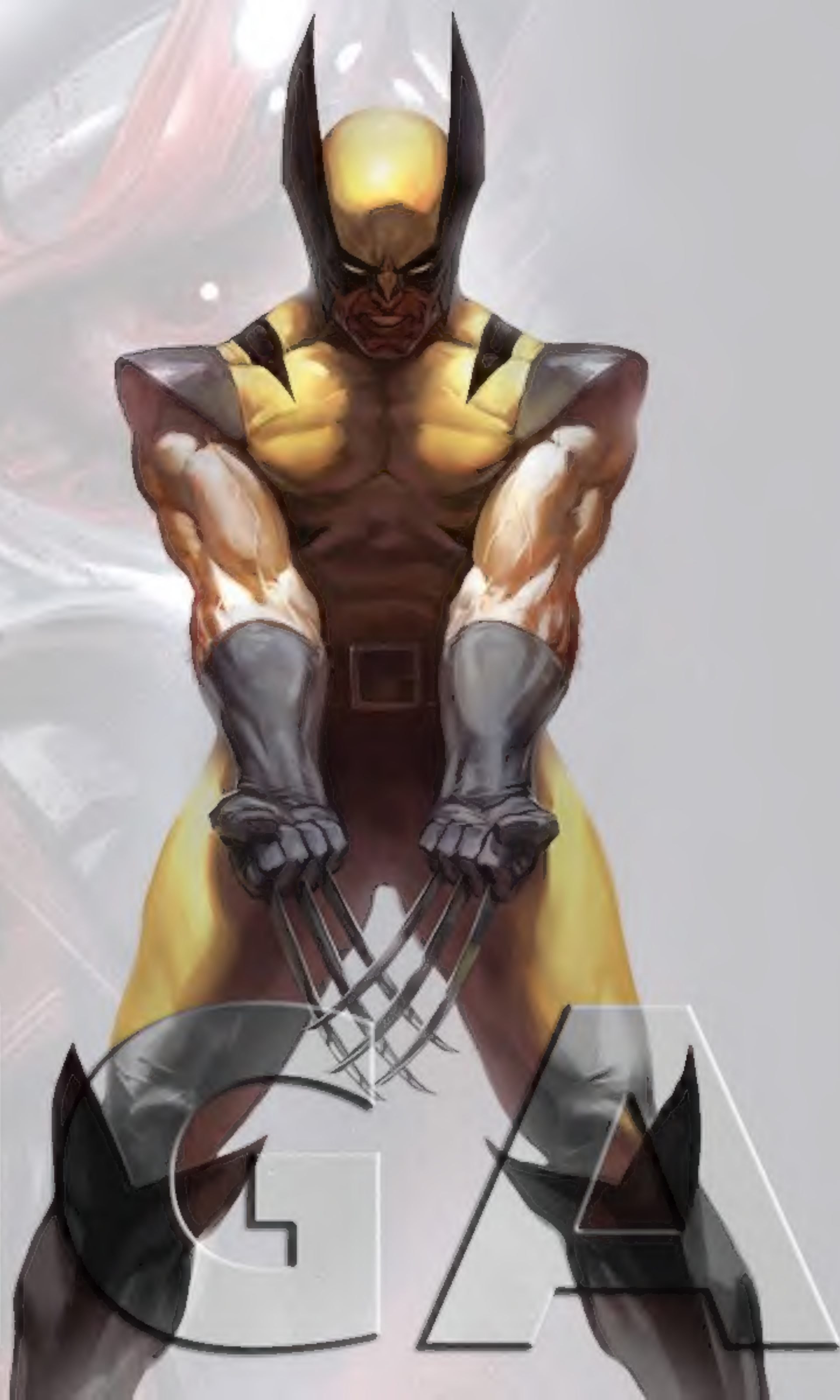






AS YOU WISH.

NEXT:
GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER



NATHAN